

Executive Summary

Background

Highway 99 is the transportation backbone of the San Joaquin Valley. A high rate of growth in the area is quickly using and exceeding the capacity of this corridor. It is clear that to maintain the corridor's ability to support ongoing development, facilitate efficient goods movement, and improve the quality of life in this fast-growing region, a substantial investment is needed to maintain and improve the corridor.

This Business Plan is a “nuts and bolts” approach to achieving the functional goals for the corridor laid out in the Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan, the Transportation Concept Reports, and the *Route 99 Corridor Enhancement Master Plan*. By clearly identifying Caltrans' long-term goals—and a corresponding list of prioritized projects to achieve those goals—the ability to make funding decisions regarding the corridor as a whole will be much easier. This Business Plan was developed to provide a guide for decision makers as they address the needs of this developing corridor.

Route 99 first became a State highway in 1909, designated as Legislative Route Number 4. It was paved in about 1913–1914 and in the 1920's was redesignated as U.S. 99 and “The Golden State Highway.” Some segments of U.S. 99 were widened to 3 lanes in the 1930's and to 4 lanes during the 1930's, 40's, and 50's. Since that time, most areas have been upgraded to freeway by closing at-grade intersections, or replacing them with interchanges. The last stoplight on Route 99 in the San Joaquin Valley was eliminated by the Livingston Bypass project in 1996.

The Annual Daily Traffic (ADT) for Route 99 ranges from a current level of 42,000 vehicles near Interstate 5 in Kern County to over 100,000 vehicles in Bakersfield, Fresno, Modesto, and Stockton. The projected traffic volume in 2025 is from 84,000 to 260,000 vehicles. Truck traffic accounts for anywhere from 19 percent in the Ceres area to nearly 27 percent near Interstate 5. The statewide average for truck volumes is about 9 percent.

Business Plan Goals

The following is a list of the goals for this Business Plan:

- Identify major projects that will improve safety, reduce congestion, and facilitate efficient goods movement along the Route 99 corridor.
- Achieve consensus among Caltrans and the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the San Joaquin Valley on the priority that will be given to different classifications of projects.
- Identify a comprehensive list of major road projects to be completed along the corridor.

- Develop strategies to improve the long-term success of all projects.
- Discuss Interstate designation for the route.
- Identify strategies for influencing land use decisions along the route.
- Identify current and future potential funding sources and strategies.
- Identify the economic benefits associated with an improved transportation corridor.
- Determine the proper phasing of construction to most efficiently invest funds in a timely manner.

Route 99 Projects

Route 99 faces many challenges now, and in the years ahead. The most significant of these include: increases in ADT and truck traffic, encroaching development, and lack of adequate funding.

While the focus of the projects identified in this Business Plan is to increase capacity or improve operations, safety is still the single most important consideration for Route 99. Caltrans has and continues to make good progress adding median barriers where appropriate to reduce or eliminate cross median accidents. These and other safety projects are typically dealt with through the State Highway Operations and Preservation Program (SHOPP). One of the most critical safety issues on the route, however, is at-grade intersections where traffic can enter, exit, or cross the freeway without the benefit of an interchange. These types of projects are beyond the ability or scope of the SHOPP program to address and must be dealt with through the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

While there are many different types of projects developed by Caltrans, MPOs, Local Tax Measure Authorities, and other local agencies for the Route 99 corridor, this Business Plan will focus on major STIP improvement projects in excess of \$8 million. For the purpose of this Business Plan, these projects have been grouped into four Priority Categories. These include:

Priority Category 1—Freeway Conversion

This category consists of projects to convert the existing Route 99 expressway sections to a full 6-lane freeway. Projects in this category will close at-grade intersections and add interchanges where appropriate to maintain local circulation, as well as widen the route to 6 lanes within the projects' limits. These projects serve a dual purpose. Not only will they improve the capacity and operation of the route, they will significantly improve safety as well by eliminating the conflicting movements that result from vehicles attempting to enter, leave, or cross the highway at the at-grade intersections. This category will be completed by the currently programmed projects on Route 99 in Madera and Merced counties. It should be noted that while all of these gap closure projects are programmed, they are not all fully funded.

Priority Category 2—Capacity-Increasing Projects

Priority Category 2 consists of projects that would widen Route 99 to a minimum of 6 lanes throughout the corridor. Projects to widen Route 99 to 8 lanes in some urban areas, where feasible, will also be considered for this category. While the primary goal of these projects is to increase capacity, there are safety benefits as well. Eliminating or reducing the incidences of stop-and-go traffic on the route will reduce the number of congestion-related accidents that currently occur.

Priority Category 3—Major Operational Improvements

This category consists of projects that will improve existing outdated interchanges and construct auxiliary lanes in urban areas. As with Priority Category 2, these projects also have a safety-related benefit.

Priority Category 4—New Interchanges

Priority Category 4 consists of projects that will construct interchanges at new locations on Route 99. These new interchanges are proposed to accommodate growth and development along Route 99.

Caltrans' first priority is to convert all remaining expressway segments to freeway. Freeway conversion projects are thus assigned Priority Category 1. By fully funding all remaining components of the programmed projects, the goal associated with Priority Category 1 would be accomplished.

Priority Category 2's stated goal is to increase capacity and provide a minimum 6-lane roadway. After completion of the three programmed 4- to 6-lane projects, approximately 105 miles of the facility will remain 4 lanes. Fourteen of the 22 capacity-increasing candidate projects propose to convert remaining 4-lane segments to 6 lanes. The remaining eight capacity-increasing projects propose to convert existing 6-lane segments to 8 lanes. Although Caltrans has a defined goal of achieving a minimum 6-lane facility, 4- to 6-lane projects may not always take precedence over 8-lane projects.

Projects that propose improvements to roadway operations are in Priority Category 3. The Priority Category 3 projects included in this Business Plan are auxiliary lane projects and interchange improvement projects. Operational interchange projects will vary in magnitude of scope. A small-scale project might construct additional ramp lanes, signalize ramp intersections, and/or improve ramp geometry. A larger scale project might replace a structure or structures or modify the entire configuration of the interchange. The scope of these projects would be determined based on the project's stated purpose and need.

Projects prompted by a need to improve local road circulation due to ongoing local development are in Priority Category 4. Three of the projects in this category propose new interchanges at new

locations and one project proposes lengthening mainline structures to allow widening of a local road.

Within the four Priority Categories there are 67 projects to be prioritized as a part of this Business Plan effort. They include 13 programmed projects and 54 candidate projects. The total cost for these improvements is estimated to be approximately \$6 billion in 2005/06 dollars.

Goods Movement

Goods movement in California represents a significant factor in economic growth and job creation. Efficient goods movement in the San Joaquin Valley is essential to the viability of the nation's largest agricultural economy. Goods movement also plays a role in efforts to reduce the region's unemployment rate, which is one of the highest in the country.

Go California specifically identifies the Central Valley as one of four "Port to Border" regional corridors. Route 99 is identified as a "Major International Trade Highway Route" in the California "Goods Movement Action Plan," dated September 2005. A safe and efficient Route 99 transportation corridor is vital to the economic vitality of the San Joaquin Valley. Improved transportation infrastructure will also contribute toward reduced air pollution.

The Route 99 capacity and operational improvements identified in this Business Plan are consistent with the "Goods Movement Action Plan" and represent a key contribution toward improving the efficiency of goods movement. In addition, upgrades of older Route 99 segments and interchanges are essential to meet the truck access standards of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act. This is particularly important as new distribution centers and businesses locate to new or expanding areas.

Just-in-time goods delivery systems and very large regional distribution centers locating in the San Joaquin Valley provide more responsive customer service and reduced inventory storage costs to the business community. However, the result of just-in-time delivery from a roadway perspective has been higher than historical growth in truck volumes on Route 99. Truck volumes on the route vary from 19 to 27 percent, as compared to the statewide average of 9 percent. Truck vehicle miles traveled in the San Joaquin Valley region are projected to increase by 60 percent over the next 20 years. The Business Plan strategies to add capacity, improve operations, use long-life pavement where appropriate, and enlarge and add new Safety Roadside Rest Areas will all contribute to more efficient goods movement.

Interstate Designation

There has been much local interest in the possible benefits of including Route 99 as a part of the Interstate system. Interstate proponents believe that inclusion of the route in the Interstate system would make the region more attractive to new employers, resulting in more and better jobs for the region. Proponents also believe Interstate designation would increase funding to the route. While

Interstate designation would make the corridor eligible for additional funding programs, it would not increase the amount of federal transportation funding available to California.

This Business Plan does not fully analyze the implications of Interstate designation, but it does present a discussion of the high level issues associated with designation. Foremost is the potential cost of upgrading the route to Interstate standards as a condition of designation. Caltrans has estimated that bringing the route up to Interstate standards would cost an additional \$14 to 19 billion (2005/06 dollars) over the amount associated with the projects include in this Business Plan.

Funding

The most significant obstacle facing the improvement of the route is the lack of adequate funding. Neither the STIP nor the SHOPP are adequately funded to maintain and improve the route. In order to attempt to address this issue, this Business Plan identifies a number of innovative funding strategies. Unfortunately, most of these are financing methods to advance future revenue streams. While these strategies can **advance** the delivery of improvement projects, most of them do not actually **generate** additional revenues. Both will be necessary to achieve the goals identified in this Business Plan.

This Business Plan lays out a 20-year program to meet the goals. This program is broken down into three phases. The phases generally coincide with the Priority Categories. Phase 1 will complete Priority Category 1, and parts of Priority Categories 2 and 3. Phase 2 will complete Priority Categories 2 and 3, and Phase 3 will complete Priority Category 4. The 20-year schedule provides five years to “ramp up” the delivery effort, and then 15 years of \$333 million in projects per year. While it is difficult to determine how much capacity the construction industry can handle each year and how much of the route can practically be under construction simultaneously, \$333 million appears to be a reasonable target.

The \$333 million per year is in 2005/06 dollars. However, the effect of inflation must also be considered. The Business Plan assumes a five percent inflation rate. When calculated into this equation, each subsequent year demands additional funds, finally topping out at approximately \$883 million in year 20.

Other 99 Issues

While the focus of this Business Plan is STIP projects, there are some specific non-STIP issues that are also discussed. These include:

- Median Barriers to improve safety
- Long-Life Pavement strategy
- Intelligent Transportation Systems
- Landscaping and facility appearance

- Safety Roadside Rest Areas
- Land Use strategies
- Environmental strategies

Implementation

This Business Plan proposes a 20-year timeframe for implementing these improvements. In discussion with the MPOs, it is clear that the Region cannot wait 20 years for implementation and there is great pressure within the Region to accelerate this effort. While Caltrans proposes a 20-year implementation schedule in this Business Plan, acceleration of this effort should be aggressively pursued. Accelerating this program may present challenges to Caltrans and the construction industry. Caltrans is willing to accept these challenges.